THE MINISTER OF AGRO AND RURAL INDUSTRIES (SHRI MAHABIR PRASAD): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. Shrinkage of husk due to disease caused by mites on coconut palms as well as drought in certain areas has resulted in poor yields of the coir fibre. The resulting high prices of coir fibre has made production of coir products more expensive. In order to mitigate the scarcity of coir fibre, a number of measures are being taken including identification of new sources of supply in States, such as, Kanataka, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh to supplement the supplies from Tamil Nadu and Kerala, three de-fibering units have been set up in Alleppey District of Kerala to promote utilization of husk available locally, and making efforts at marketing arrangements for distribution of coir fibre to small scale manufacturers of coir products.

(c) and (d) Yes, Sir. The Government has already filed its negotiating proposals with the WTO for including products such as coir in the rationalization of products coverage in the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA). Pursuant to General Council Decision of 1st August, 2004, the negotiations will continue upto December, 2005.

Duties of Coir Board in Andhra Pradesh

2389. SHRI S. M. LALJAN BASHA: Will the Minister of AGRO AND RURAL INDUSTRIES be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have assigned specific duties to the Coir Board to help coconut growers;

(b) to what extent the Coir Board has made its presence felt in Andhra Pradesh;

(c) the details of such work done by the Coir Board in helping farmers of Andhra Pradesh in the year 2003-04;

(d) whether any funds were made available by the Coir Board in that period; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF AGRO AND RURAL INDUSTRIES (SHRI MAHABIR PRASAD): (a) to (c) The Coir Board, a statutory body, had been established for the promotion and development of coir industry in India. Extending help to coconut farmers does not come under its purview.

The Coir Board is undertaking various schemes for the development of coir industry in all the coconut growing States including Andhra Pradesh. Following programmes have been implemented for the development of coir industry:

(i) Research and Development;

(ii) Training, Extension, Quality Improvement, Mahila Coir Yojana and Welfare Measures;

(iii) Development of Production infrastructure;

(iv) Domestic Market Development;

(v) Export Market Promotion;

(vi) Trade Information Service, Information Technology and Strengthening of Head Quarters; and

(vii) Cooperativisation;

(d) and (e) As a part of skill development, the Coir Board, during 2003-04, had imparted training to 150 coir workers in spinning coir yarn on motorized ratts/motorized traditional ratts with a monthly stipend at the rate of Rs. 500/-. Trainers had been given Honorarium of Rs. 3000/- per month during the training period. Under the scheme of Mahila Coir Yojana, the trainees who had successfully completed the training were provided motorized ratts/motorized traditional ratts at 75% cost subsidy. During 2003-04 motorised ratts had been distributed to 10 coir workers and a subsidy of Rs. 69,000/- were released for the purpose.

Exploration of mineral sand in Kerala

2390. SHRI N. K. PREMACHANDRAN: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) the stage at which the joint venture project participating NMDP, IRE and KSIDC for the exploration of mineral sand of Chavara in Kerala stands at present; and

(b) the progress attained in the proposal so far?